



# Sandwich Board (A-Frame) Sign Guidelines and Procedures

## **Definition:**

The City Code permits A-frame (or “sandwich”) portable signs with two flat faces in the Old Town Fairfax Historic Overlay District. Such signs must be constructed of durable materials, are meant to be self-supporting on the ground, and may or may not have changeable copy.

## **Where are A-frame signs permitted?**

A-frame signs are permitted **ONLY** in the Old Town Historic District and **ONLY** on private property. A-frame signs are **NOT** permitted off-site, on publicly-owned sidewalks, or in any location outside the Historic District. Approved signs should only be displayed if the business they advertise is open and should be brought inside when businesses close for the evening. When displayed, such signs should be secured to prevent injury or danger to the public.

## **What approvals or permits do I need for an A-frame sign?**

***A-frame signs are considered permanent business signs and all such signs require a sign permit from the City’s Zoning Office.***

When your application for a sign permit for an a-frame sign is approved, you will receive a sign permit sticker and it must be affixed to the sign. All such signs must have design approval and adhere to City code requirements, as noted below.

***A-frame signs require design approval.*** A-frame signs that meet the following criteria are pre-approved for consistency with the City’s historic district guidelines for signage, and therefore you may proceed directly to obtain a sign permit to display them:

1. Signs that complement the scale and architectural features of the building to which they are appurtenant.
2. Signs that are oriented to, and do not interfere with, pedestrian traffic.
3. One sign per address, except on a corner lot where two may be permitted. If more than one business shares an entrance, then signs can represent more than one business.
4. Signs executed by sign professionals, with a finished appearance and professionally painted or applied lettering

*The iron frame of this sign is a good material for the historic district.*



*These wood signs with chalkboards are also appropriate.*



*Well-designed wood A-frames are attractive and add to the liveliness of the historic downtown.*



*Plastic frames are durable and therefore acceptable, but they must be carefully designed to meet the Historic District guidelines for signage in terms of professional execution, lettering, colors, and graphics.*

(not rough-cut plywood with a “graffiti” look and hand painted or stenciled lettering). Hand lettering is, however, appropriate on slate or chalkboard signage.

5. Signs that are simple, legible and direct.
6. No single lettering style is preferred; however lettering should generally be limited to two styles. Mixed upper and lower case lettering and serif style lettering is encouraged.
7. Use of traditional sign materials such as wood and metal for framing and painted on or vinyl letters applied to wood or metal is preferred. Other durable material options such as plastic frames with coroplast or similar insert materials may be appropriate if the lettering and graphics applied to them meet the other criteria for the historic district in terms of color, lettering style, and graphics.
8. Sign colors should complement the materials and color scheme of the building, including accent and trim colors and should be consistent with the character of the historic district. A limit of three colors is generally recommended, although more colors might be appropriate in exceptional and tastefully executed designs. Matte finishes are preferred to avoid reflective glare from street and building lighting or vehicle headlights.

***Deviation from the standards listed above will require an application and a hearing before the Board of Architectural Review to seek design approval.***

#### **What regulations must all A-frame signs adhere to?**

- Signs may be no greater than 6 square feet per side.
- Signs must be located on private property and only in the Old Town Fairfax Historic Overlay District. Signs displayed without permits are subject to enforcement action, including but not limited to substantial daily fines. **Note that a-frame signs placed on public sidewalks, on public property, or in public rights of way are subject to both fines and on-the-spot removal by City staff.**
- Signs must NOT impede pedestrian flow.
- The vertex of the angle formed by A-frame signs that are in-use must be less than 45°. A-frame signs may NOT be opened and placed on the ground flat.
- Signs may NOT be lighted (internally or externally).
- Signs may NOT be adorned with balloons, pennants, decorative bulbs, nor any other feature that is not part of a frame authorized through the design approval process.



*Frames with changeable inserts meeting these guidelines, using professionally prepared graphics, are acceptable.*



Poorly designed A-frame signs and signs placed on public sidewalks are **NOT** acceptable.